

This month in [wjm](#)

Children can be taught to behave safely around strange dogs

Dog bites are a major cause of injury in children. In the United States, there are more than 300,000 emergency department visits for dog-bite injuries each year. Boys aged 5 to 9 years are particularly at risk. But can children be taught to avoid being attacked by dogs? In a randomized controlled trial, Chapman and colleagues found that a brief lesson from a dog handler increased the precautionary behavior of young children around strange dogs (page 233). But it is uncertain, says Grossman in a commentary on page 234, whether this behavioral change will translate into fewer bite injuries.

Claims that plant estrogens are beneficial are unsupported

Plant estrogens—found in soy products—are promoted by health food stores as a “natural alternative” to hormone replacement therapy. But in a curbside consult on page 272, Gibaldi says that there is no evidence to suggest that these phytoestrogens have beneficial clinical effects. The isoflavones in soy products have also been associated with cancer.

Poor communication leads to grievances against physicians

Patients have become increasingly empowered and, therefore, more likely to complain when they are dissatisfied with their physician. But what leads to this dissatisfaction? In a retrospective review of 11 years' experience with a medical society's grievance committee, Halperin found some an-

swers (page 235). Complaints about physicians included that they were rude and that they failed to make a prompt diagnosis. Inadequate communication was at the root of many complaints. Patient grievances are “a continuing challenge for medical science,” says Localio on page 239.

Guidelines may help to reduce deaths from meningitis

Nearly 1 in 4 adults with acute bacterial meningitis die, and many survivors are left with chronic disabilities. The prognosis is worse if there is a delay in management, and so the outcome depends on whether the attending physician suspects the diagnosis and whether the health care system is set up to aid rapid diagnosis and therapy. Standardized guidelines for management are invaluable, argue Møller and Skinhøj in an Op-Ed on page 223. Those recently issued by the British Infection Society may provide a template for use by physicians in other countries.

Physicians can learn ways to notify relatives about sudden deaths

After the sudden death of a patient, it is often up to the physician to break the terrible news to the relatives. But the “survivors” have had no time to prepare for their loss, and the task of telling them is often terrifying. Iserson reviews the ways in which physicians can remain compassionate while notifying survivors (page 261). Using non-medical language is important, as is showing that you care that their loved one has died. Protocols can help notifiers to prepare for their task and to understand what to expect.